



TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT

HoCo By Design General Plan

Planning Board Meeting of March 9, 2023

Petitioner: Amy Gowan, Director, Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ)

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Request: Request of the Planning Board to hold a public hearing for input and recommendation to the County Council on the draft General Plan Update, HoCo By Design, which includes a Plan for the Route 1 Corridor.

Description: HoCo By Design is the County's proposed general plan, a long-range policy guide that informs decisions on land use, transportation, economic development, community character, natural resources, housing choices and infrastructure over the next twenty years.

HoCo By Design aspires to improve upon its predecessor, PlanHoward 2030, with a four-pronged, aspirational approach towards greater equity, predictability, sustainability and achievability:

- **Equity** is about crafting a future ripe with opportunities for ALL people and ALL communities, including access to attainable housing, amenity-rich neighborhoods, high-quality education and economically-uplifting employment.
- **Predictability** informs future land use with greater detail and specificity of future outcomes, and guides budget priorities to align decisions for a shared understanding of direction and sequencing.
- **Sustainability** is about shaping growth and preservation in a manner that protects our valuable natural resources, reduces environmental impacts through vertical and compact development, and responsibly balances and grows our fiscal resources to deliver the government services that enhance our quality of life

- **Achievability** aims to provide realistic direction that is grounded in stakeholder input, considers resource limitations, and helps the County measure progress toward attaining the community's vision.

HoCo By Design contains eleven chapters and three technical appendices. The first chapter contains introductory material, including the plan's vision. Chapter two establishes a strategy to balance growth and conservation over the next two decades, in addition to presenting the future land use map, which organizes the County into eighteen character areas.

Chapters three to seven address five major planning themes or issue areas: the environment (Ecological Health), the transportation system (County in Motion), economic development (Economic Prosperity), housing options (Dynamic Neighborhoods), and community character (Quality By Design). Cross-cutting topics, such as agriculture, appear in multiple chapters.

Public school facilities, other types of supporting infrastructure, and growth management are the focus of chapters eight to ten. Finally, the last chapter describes implementation, outlining how the plan's actions will be carried out by various agencies as well as monitored through reporting.

Complimenting these chapters are three appendices containing technical information on the environment, character areas, and focus areas.

Route 1 Plan:

In 2018, the County launched a Route 1 Corridor master planning initiative to develop recommendations for revitalization strategies specific to Route 1. Since the HoCo By Design General Plan update was launched while the Route 1 Corridor master planning effort was underway, that initiative was woven into HoCo By Design, including reports and recommendations based on community input received and an evaluation of conditions along the Corridor. Data was incorporated into HoCo By Design's countywide analysis and modeling, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation of the Corridor relative to Howard County as a whole.

The Route 1 Corridor Plan's vision emphasizes preserving Washington Boulevard as an industrial employment and transportation corridor, while targeting very specific areas for mixed-use redevelopment. Unique to Route 1, these mixed-use activity centers include areas intended to allow light industrial uses alongside non-industrial uses. Overall, the vision is trying to achieve a greater balance between non-residential and residential growth in the Route 1 Corridor by targeting construction of new residential units in mixed-use activity centers and encouraging non-residential opportunities everywhere else in the Corridor. This plan should be read as a supplement to the broader policies and implementing actions of HoCo By Design.

Public Outreach:

The scope of community engagement that has been conducted for HoCo By Design is unprecedented for Howard County. Planning for the HoCo By Design public engagement effort began in May 2020, following the preparation of General Plan Guidelines. These Guidelines served as the "plan for the plan" and called for a holistic and inclusive planning process.

HoCo By Design launched just as COVID-19 was shutting down the country. While the public engagement plan already included a variety of online opportunities, these became more important and more frequently used in 2020. As the pandemic

progressed, the project team adapted to working in a virtual environment and maximized the opportunities and benefits that this cultural shift offered.

From 2020 to 2022, the team facilitated nearly 100 community meetings, collected approximately 1,700 survey forms, and compiled roughly 12,000 public comments. Virtual meetings were well-attended, with participation exceeding attendance levels at pre-pandemic, in-person planning meetings. Project awareness was bolstered by a robust project website and social media presence.

To supplement the digital outreach, fliers inviting public participation in the planning process accompanied approximately 80,000 water bills, yard signs were posted in County parks, and postcards were placed in local library pick up bags and Roving Radish meal kits. Materials were translated into multiple different languages to reach more people in the community. Additionally, the HoCo by Design website was equipped with a Google Translate feature.

In 2021, the project team held a special series of design workshops for New Town Columbia. These sessions were held to study community character and possible approaches to redevelopment, should it occur. Each event built upon the previous effort to: identify design principles important for different areas, present draft illustrative design concepts for comments based on prior community feedback, and present final illustrative design concepts. The final illustrations are presented in HoCo By Design's Focus Areas appendix.

While initial engagement activities were well-attended, the project team saw an opportunity to increase diversity and inclusion as the planning effort continued. A new engagement platform, that followed a focus group format, was launched to target conversations with populations traditionally underrepresented in planning efforts. The project team reached over 100 individuals representing diverse backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities. The small group format—with flexible scheduling, organized through trusted community-based organizations—resulted in valuable input that complemented the initial engagement that had already occurred. Following the release of the public draft, the project team held an Equity Open House to spotlight equity-related actions in the plan.

Multiple HoCo By Design chapters summarize feedback collected through both general public engagement and targeted focus groups. Notable quotes from participants are also showcased. The project team used input collected throughout the process to draft, then refine, the plan's policies and actions.

Feedback collected was also posted on the project website's public engagement page, where a Comment Log compiled all written survey comments received, and an Engagement Summary described results from various engagement initiatives. These materials are available online via the following link:
<https://www.hocobydesign.com/public-engagement>.

The team also engaged the Planning Board in three workshops to discuss the public draft. These workshops were held in December 2022, January 2023, and February 2023. Video clips from these presentations are being posted on the HoCo By Design web page and full video recordings can be found on the Planning Board [web page](#) under Past Meetings. The project team incorporated feedback received from the Planning Board into the current version of the draft plan.

Advisory Committees:

Planning Advisory Committee: To initiate the planning process, a 33-member Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) was appointed by the County Executive and Council, which represented community leaders, service providers, industry groups, and the general public. They served as a sounding board to the project team about the community's needs and desires in the development of the General Plan. PAC members assisted in developing and identifying planning themes, reviewing data and recommendations, and serving as ambassadors for the process. The PAC is also assisted in developing the future land use map (FLUM) and contributing to recommendations in HoCo By Design. Specific topics to which members contributed include: the Preserve-Strengthen-Enhance-Transform (PSET) framework, character area typologies, transportation and water-sewer infrastructure, a growth allocation framework, and growth management strategies.

Technical Advisory Group: The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) consisted of Howard County Department staff and partner organizations who are considered subject matter and institutional experts. The HoCo By Design project team consulted with TAG members regularly to verify and validate key findings, ideas, data and reports.

Strategic Advisory Groups: During the Spring of 2021, three Strategic Advisory Groups (SAGs) were formed to delve into specific opportunities and challenges identified through the planning process. Each SAG comprised a multi-disciplinary group of experts that acted as advisors to the project team, similar to policy think tanks. The SAGs addressed three different topic areas: schools (Planning for School Capacity and Growth), environment (Examining Climate Change and Natural Resources), and housing (Diversifying Housing Stock and Creating Opportunities for Missing Middle Housing).

Data Analysis/nd Best Practices: HoCo By Design was based not only on public feedback, but also on data analysis and best practice research. At the beginning of the planning process, the County hired a team of national and local consultants to provide expertise in multiple subject areas. These consultants developed a series of physical assessments covering the following topics: land use, community character, supporting infrastructure, market and economics, agriculture, environment, and transportation. Each assessment described existing conditions and concluded with a list of observations and recommendations to further explore during the process.

The HoCo By Design process included a scenario planning component that allowed stakeholders to evaluate four alternative futures for the County. Building upon the physical assessments, the project team used CommunityViz software to model potential future year growth and conservation patterns and measure potential impacts of each scenario. Based on the impacts analysis of the scenarios, as well as community and PAC feedback, a final preferred hybrid scenario was crafted--represented by the HoCo By Design Future Land Use Map (FLUM). The FLUM was modeled in CommunityViz as a form of "ground truthing" to ensure that the County has land available to support the hybrid scenario and to identify infrastructure demands for informed decision making. A fiscal impact analysis was also conducted for each scenario to determine the long-term impacts on the County's budget for each of the growth scenarios and the FLUM. More information

on these specific analyses can be found in the HoCo By Design Scenario Planning Guide, available via the following link:

<https://www.hocobydesign.com/scenario-planning>

In addition to scenario development, the HoCo By Design CommunityViz model assessed specific impacts and issues that arose during the General Plan process, including an evaluation of opportunities and constraints related to expanding the Planned Service Area, and potential impacts and opportunities to preserve environmental features, such as the Green Infrastructure Network.

Resource Documents:

Various resource documents were used to inform policies and actions in HoCo By Design. These include the Engagement Summary, Fiscal Impact Analysis, the Housing Opportunities Master Plan's Market Overview and Background Research appendix, and physical assessments prepared for HoCo By Design. These materials are posted on the project website via the following links:

<https://www.hocobydesign.com/draft-release>


<https://www.hocobydesign.com/physical-assessments>

Planning Board Review:

§16.900(j)(1)(III) states that a bill proposing adoption of the general plan shall not be added to the Council's legislative agenda until the County Council has received a recommendation and report from the Planning Board.

DPZ Recommendation:

That the Planning Board recommend **approval** of HoCo By Design, including the Route 1 Plan.


Amy Gowan, Director

Department of Planning and Zoning

2/23/23
Date

Attachments

- HoCo By Design – Planning Board Draft, February 2023 – available via the following link:
<https://www.hocobydesign.com/draft-release>